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# Crile, on Stand, Accused Of Subverting the Truth

By M. A. FARBER

Comparing what was shown on the air to what was not, lawyers for Gen. William C. Westmoreland yesterday accused George Crile, the producer of a disputed CBS documentary on the Vietnam war, of using the editorial process to subvert the truth.

Mr. Crile, testifying for the fourth day at the Westmoreland-CBS libel trial in Federal District Court, said that he "resented" the attacks and that General Westmoreland's lawyers were distorting what the producer had done and the 15-year-old events portrayed in the 1982 broadcast.

By their attempts to "misconstrue" what some participants in the documentary had said — taking transcript passages "in isolation" — Mr. Crile told the jury, the lawyers, not he, were doing "a great disservice to the truth."

As he had on Wednesday, Dan M. Burt, General Westmoreland's lead attorney, cited a number of examples where segments of interviews had been edited out of the broadcast — leaving the viewer, he suggested, with a "misleading" impression of what had happened in Vietnam in 1967 and what had been said to CBS in 1981 when it was preparing its program.

For instance, General Westmoreland had told Mike Wallace, the narrator of the documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," that President Lyndon B. Johnson had welcomed and accentuated good news but that the general gave him "both the good and the bad." The latter phrase, however, was not broadcast.

## Viewers Said to Be Alerted

But Mr. Crile said the question that preceded the general's answer — "Was President Johnson a difficult man to feed bad news about the war?" alerted viewers that Mr. Johnson had been given "bad news," as well as good.

Mr. Burt also tried to show that, in contrast to the treatment of General Westmoreland when he was interviewed — the general has testified that he was "ambushed" by the network — key participants whom CBS believed would support the "conspiracy" thesis of its broadcast had been coddled.

Mr. Burt brought out, for instance, that Maj. Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, who was General Westmoreland's intelligence chief between 1965 and June 1, 1967, was given extensive information on CBS's findings before he was interviewed on camera at his home in Hobe Sound, Fla.

George Allen, the former deputy chief of Vietnamese affairs for the Central Intelligence Agency, was interviewed on camera twice by Mr. Crile,

the 39-year-old producer acknowledged yesterday. And before the second session, Mr. Crile said, Mr. Allen was shown filmed interviews with General McChristian and others to help him "clarify his thoughts."

Q. And you showed him the interviews in order to coach him, correct, sir?

A. Mr. Burt, George Allen is one of the most distinguished public servants that I am aware of. He has served his country well. No one was going to coach George Allen on what he would say about Vietnam, about the enemy we had to fight, about his particular field of expertise.

Q. You knew when you showed Mr. Allen the interviews of other people prior to the second filmed interview with him that that was not the proper thing to do, did you not, sir?

A. Mr. Burt, it is standard reporter procedure to tell people that you are interviewing information that you have gained in the hopes that it will elicit more information from them, something that I think you see on broadcasts often, and it is something that reporters do on a regular basis.

General Westmoreland, who led American forces in Vietnam between 1964 and 1968, contends in his \$120 million suit that CBS defamed him by saying he deceived Mr. Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the size and nature of the enemy in the year preceding the 1968 Tet offensive.

The documentary charged a "conspiracy" by General Westmoreland's command to minimize the strength of North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces to make it seem the United States was winning a "war of attrition." The general himself, it said, imposed an "arbitrary ceiling" of 300,000 on reports of enemy strength after June 1967, leaving Washington "totally unprepared" for the scope of the Tet attack.

Mr. Crile, like Mr. Wallace and Samuel A. Adams, a former C.I.A. analyst who served as a consultant to CBS for

the documentary, is a defendant at this trial before Judge Pierre N. Leval.

Mr. Adams, who was in favor of a substantially higher estimate of enemy strength than General Westmoreland in 1967, was a participant in efforts at that time to resolve the issue. Another participant whose name arose in court yesterday was Col. Gains Hawkins, a ranking intelligence officer in General Westmoreland's command until the late summer of 1967.

Colonel Hawkins told CBS in 1981 that while he "defended" General Westmoreland's lower numbers in meetings with the C.I.A., he considered them too low. But "the message we got," he said, was that higher figures would not be accepted by the general.

The dispute was finally settled at the time by a "compromise" agreement and formalized in a "national intelligence estimate" for the President. But, in its documentary, CBS characterized the agreement as a "capitulation" by the C.I.A. to "demands" of General Westmoreland.

Yesterday, Mr. Burt showed Mr. Crile the transcript of his first interview with Mr. Allen, in which the following exchange — not used on the air — appeared.

MR. CRILE: But in — but — but please, in November of — in September of 1967 when we are moving towards a war with 500,000 troops in Vietnam to — consciously in a national intelligence estimate say that the enemy is much, much smaller than you believed to be the case, isn't that an extreme position for the Central Intelligence Agency to take?

MR. ALLEN: But that is not what the estimate said. Mind you! The numbers were in there.

MR. CRILE: But my view — Mr. Allen —

MR. ALLEN: The presentation was different.

Mr. Burt read the passage aloud, and asked Mr. Crile whether it did not contradict the views expressed by Mr. Allen on the air.

But Mr. Crile, offering to help the lawyer "understand this," said that Mr. Allen eventually came to regard the agreement on a lower estimate for the enemy as the intelligence "mistake of the century." In 1981, Mr. Crile said, Mr. Allen felt "awkward about in any way saying anything critical about the C.I.A." and, in that passage, was looking for "an intellectually defensible fig leaf to put over the position that had been taken" by the agency in 1967.

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"Mr. Burt," Mr. Crile said, "I would not have wanted to put in the broadcast a line in which Mr. Allen would not have felt comfortable with, nor would I have felt comfortable with it if I thought it did not reflect his views."

The lawyer also showed Mr. Crile an unbroadcast answer given by Colonel Hawkins in a 1981 interview with CBS, in which the colonel said he was not told to refrain from reporting higher figures for the enemy.

"I continued to report what was there," the colonel had told Mr. Crile.

Mr. Crile said yesterday that the answer only reflected the fact that Colonel Hawkins was in no position to tell the men in his unit to stop work. The colonel, Mr. Crile insisted, was still unable to get the higher numbers accepted by his superiors.

Mr. Burt read out, as well, an exchange between Mr. Crile and General McChristian during an interview in 1981, in which the producer asked whether the general might have been transferred out of Vietnam in June 1967 because of his "attempt to increase the enemy strength estimates" the previous month.

MR. CRILE: "Because you would not keep the numbers down."

GENERAL MCCHRISTIAN: "No, because nobody ever asked me that, because I reported it as I saw it and evidently people didn't like my reporting because I was constantly showing that enemy strength was increasing."

On the documentary, Mr. Crile's remarks to General McChristian were substituted by a statement by Mr. Wallace: "Consider General Westmoreland's dilemma. If he accepted his intelligence chief's findings, he would have to take the bad news to the President. If he didn't, well, there was only General McChristian to deal with."

And General McChristian's answer begins with the word "Evidently."

Mr. Crile told the jury that the alteration was made because General McChristian had not been ordered before May 1967 to keep enemy strength figures low.